

***Testimony of Representative Niki Tsongas
House Committee on Natural Resources
Subcommittee on Public Lands and Environmental Regulation
Legislative Hearing on H.R. 412
“The Nashua River Wild and Scenic River Study Act”
June 6, 2013***

Chairman Bishop and Ranking Member Grijalva, thank you for holding this hearing today and for providing me the opportunity to share my remarks on H.R. 412, the Nashua River Wild and Scenic River Study Act of 2013. I also want to thank Elizabeth Ainsley Campbell, the Executive Director of the Nashua River Watershed Association, who will be testifying today in support of H.R. 412.

The history and development of the towns and cities in the 3rd District of Massachusetts has been defined by the many rivers that course through these unique communities. From the mighty Merrimack River that supported the birth of the industrial revolution in Lowell to the Concord River where a famous shot was heard ‘round the world, our rivers continue to play an important role in connecting our communities.

But time and development have not always been kind to these rivers. Beginning in the 1700s and continuing to just a few decades ago, paper, shoe, and textile factories were constructed along the Nashua River and many other rivers in the area. The powerful currents of the rivers powered the factories and made their success possible. But at the same time, the factories were releasing industrial waste right back into the river, polluting the very source of their success.

By the mid-1960s, the Nashua River was one of the most polluted rivers in the nation. In fact, the river would change color almost daily, because of the inks and dyes released into the river by the paper factories. The river was so badly polluted that it was classified as unfit to even receive any further sewage, and the days of seeing fish swimming through the water were long gone.

But in 1965, one 3rd District resident, Marion Stoddart, realized that something had to be done. Ms. Stoddart formed the Nashua River Clean-Up Committee to work toward cleaning up the river and protecting the land along its banks. Thanks to her work, and the continued work of the Nashua River Watershed Association, the Nashua River has come a long way since the 1960s. Pollution from the mills has been cleaned up, new sewage treatment plants now keep sewage out of the

river, and more than 8,000 acres of land and 85 miles of greenway along the riverbanks have been permanently conserved.

I can't praise enough Marion and all the dedicated residents, volunteers, and Association staff who have spent countless hours working to ensure that the Nashua River can once again be an asset and resource to the communities through which it passes.

But there is still much work to be done, and that is why I partnered with the Nashua River Watershed Association to introduce H.R. 412, a bill that will initiate a three-year study to determine whether roughly 28 miles of the Nashua River and its tributaries can be designated as Wild and Scenic Rivers.

This study will allow the National Park Service, the Watershed Association, and local governments and stakeholders to work together in forming a plan to protect the Nashua River and ensure that it remains a great place for canoeing, fishing, and enjoying the outdoors.

Every town through which the Nashua River passes, in addition to several local environmental organizations, support the adoption of this legislation, and with your permission, Mr. Chairman, I would like to submit those letters for the record.

In 1999, 29 miles of the nearby Assabet, Sudbury, and Concord Rivers were designated as Wild and Scenic Rivers. Since then, we have seen how this designation can help protect not only the quality of the rivers, but the quality of the recreational activities that they support. It is my hope that the Wild and Scenic designation can be expanded to the Nashua River so we can see the same successes there. The study that H.R. 412 will initiate is essential to starting this process. H.R. 412 is identical to legislation that was reported out of the full Committee in the 112th Congress and it incorporates an amendment offered by Chairman Bishop to add several requirements to the study relating to the effects on commercial and recreational uses, private property, and energy production and transmission.

In closing, I would like to again thank Chairman Bishop and Ranking Member Grijalva, as well as the other members of the Subcommittee, for holding a hearing on H.R. 412. I also want to recognize the hard work of the Subcommittee staff, especially Amelia Jenkins, in organizing this hearing.

It is my hope that the members of this subcommittee will appreciate the importance of moving this legislation forward to help protect and rejuvenate the natural beauty of the Nashua River and its tributaries.

Thank you, and I yield back.